

Employability and Work Life of People with Disabilities in Higher Education Sector

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ABSTRACT

This review-based article focuses on examining theoretical cum research-based literature pertaining to topic of employability and work life for disabled persons in higher education sector. It also investigates about research studies on the topic of views of academicians regarding the employability and professional life of persons with health-related debilities in the higher educational institutions. Author of this intellectual work has given his perspectives on topics related to employability and work life of persons with disabilities in higher educational organizations of "India". An examination of the available literature regarding employability and work life of individuals with disabilities indicates a deficiency of both review based and research related literature on this topic, both in "India" and at international level. There is a scarcity of qualitative research studies, both in "India" and foreign countries, that elucidates the viewpoints of current and former educators in the higher education sector regarding the theme of this article. Challenges mentioned by the author concerning employment opportunities for disabled individuals in "India's higher educational sector", consists of restricted job prospects for them in both central and state universities as well as hesitance of private higher educational institutions to provide work opportunities for such individuals. Views of author regarding problems faced by employees with health-related debilities in "Indian higher education institutions", include inadequate infrastructure accommodating the needs of staffs with chronic health limitations, inconsistent implementation of work flexibility tailored to specific health limitations of such employees, insufficient support from supervisors cum colleagues, etc. Recommendations in this scholarly endeavour would enhance the employability of individuals with disabilities and elevate their quality of work life within the context of "Indian higher education".

(I) Context of this article

Individuals with disabilities having required educational qualifications, skills and passion to work in higher education sector in this world require employment opportunities and a supportive work environment to lead a meaningful and economically independent life. Author of this article based on his individual research interest wanted to understand about availability of both review based and research related studies regarding employability and work life of disabled persons specifically in higher education sector. He was also interested to know about qualitative research studies related to perspectives of academicians on topic of work opportunities and occupational life of individuals having health related debilities. The above-mentioned factors led him to develop this review-based article on this topic.

(II) Statement of this intellectual work

This review article analyses theoretical and research literature about employability and professional life for individuals with disabilities in the higher education sector. It also examines research studies concerning the perspectives of academicians on the work opportunities and professional lives of individuals with health-related limitations in higher educational institutions.

(III) Scope and significance of this article

This intellectual endeavour will present literature pertaining to disability, employment challenges faced by individuals with disabilities and obstacles encountered by those with health-related limitations in the workplace. It will analyse about available literature on work opportunities and occupational life for individuals with disabilities in the higher education sector. It will examine about research work on the perspectives of academicians on the employability and occupational life of these individuals within the mentioned sector. Author of this scholarly work has presented his views on themes related to employability and the professional life of individuals with disabilities in higher education institutions in "India". This scholarly endeavour would offer practical recommendations to improve the employability of differently abled individuals in India and to elevate their quality of work life.

This review-based article is relevant for "Disability Studies" subject because of the scarcity of literature that combines reviews and research on the mentioned topic. This intellectual work is pertinent to subjects such as "Social Work, Sociology, and Education", as the theme of this article is related to the aforementioned

courses. This article is essential for individuals with disabilities pursuing employment in higher education and for those currently engaged in colleges and universities in the specified country. It seeks to offer viable answers to their employment and work-life related problems. This article is pertinent to the “University Grants Commission (UGC), Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Government of India, and the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India”, as it would facilitate the formulation of policies or official directives aimed at improving employment prospects for individuals with health-related debilities and implementing strategies to elevate the quality of their professional lives.

(IV) Objectives of this scholarly work

This review-based article examines theoretical and empirical work about employability and professional life of individuals with disabilities within the higher education sector. It also analyses research findings regarding the viewpoints of academicians on the employment prospects and work life of individuals with health-related limitations in higher education institutions.

(V) Review of Literature

(a) Disability

“United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006)”

This is the preliminary legally binding treaty on human rights specifically for those with disabilities. It was adopted on “13 December 2006” at the “United Nations” headquarters in “New York” city. It became effective on “3rd May 2008 (<https://social.desa.un.org/issues/disability/crpd/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-crpd>)”. It offers two definitions of disability. The Preamble of the aforementioned Convention states that “Disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others”. It emphasises that “Individuals with disabilities encompass those who possess long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments that, when interacting with various barriers, may obstruct their full and effective participation in society on an equal footing with others”. The aforementioned definitions of disability and individuals with disabilities are presented in the doctoral dissertation by “Malvika (2016)”. “Disabled individuals are defined by the 'Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995' as those who experience a minimum of 40 percent disability, as certified by a medical authority designated by the appropriate government.”

As per the aforementioned Act, “Disability” encompasses the following:

(i) Visual impairment; (ii) Reduced vision; (iii) History of Leprosy recovery; (iv) Auditory disabilities; (v) Locomotor impairment; (vi) Cognitive disability; and (vii) Mental health disorder.

Census of India (2011) indicated that the number of disability categories rose from five to eight. It encompasses the following types of disability:

(i) Visual impairment, (ii) Auditory impairment, (iii) Speech impairment, (iv) Motor disability, (v) Intellectual disability, (vi) Psychological disorder, (vii) Other disabilities, and (viii) Multiple disabilities.

(b) Problems experienced by differently abled persons in employment

Some employers have got negative sentiments towards individuals with disabilities, expressing concerns regarding issues such as accommodation expenses, potential litigation, job performance, and the educational qualifications of differently abled individuals (“Hernandez, Keys, & Balcazar, 2000; Graffam, Shinkfield, Smith, & Polzin, 2002; Unger, 2002; Morgan & Alexander, 2005; Kaye, Jans, & Jones, 2011; Burke, Bezyak, Fraser, Pete, Ditchman, & Chan, 2013; Waxman, 2017; as cited in Bredgaard, & Salado-Rasmussen, 2021.”). Lee, Abdullah, and Mey (2011) conducted interviews with 24 educators with visual impairments and discovered that individuals with disabilities encounter challenges in securing employment. The primary themes identified in this study as impediments to the employment of individuals with disabilities include employers' negative perceptions and treatment (i.e., employers' unfavourable attitudes and lack of trust in the work capabilities of those with health-related impairments), deficiencies in individuals with health limitations (i.e., inadequacies in academic skills, low self-esteem, and lack of confidence), as well as parent’s detrimental mindset (i.e., Instilling unrealistic aspirations and a tendency to excessively protect disabled individuals). Poonam and Dr. Alok Kumar (2016) have mentioned the challenges that disabled individuals encounter in securing employment. The problems cited include inadequate literacy levels, insufficient daily living skills, lack of self-esteem and confidence, and overprotective parenting.

The literature review conducted by Ruhindwa, Randall, and Cartmel (2016) summarised the findings of research works concerning the principal challenges and obstacles to the employment of those with disabilities. It also delineates critical strategies to enhance workforce participation for “Australians” with health-related limitations.

(c) Difficulties faced by disabled employees in work

The views articulated by Christopher, a differently abled individual, in the study done by Wilson-Kovacs, Ryan, Haslam, and Rabinovich (2008) suggest that colleagues are reluctant to offer aid. Kulkarni and Valk (2010) discovered that fewer than half (46 percent) of respondents with disabilities reported that managers and coworkers are typically supportive in daily tasks, while some required occasional reminders regarding the condition and its related constraints. Research conducted by Ta and Leng (2013) suggests that 14 percent of respondents having health related debilities experienced challenges with their workplace. 10 percent of those with health restrictions experienced difficulties with their coworkers. Narayanan (2018) seeks to analyse the various challenges faced by disabled individuals in the workplace and proposes several solutions to empower impaired “Malaysians”, especially in professional settings. The data for this research was acquired by surveys, interviews, observations, and secondary sources (library research). This study revealed that individuals with health-related limitations persistently encounter discrimination in the workplace in various forms. This research identified multiple barriers, including an inaccessible physical environment, a lack of essential assistive devices, and a negative attitude from colleagues and management towards those with health limitations. Vijayalakshmi’s (2018) study indicates that differently abled participants moderately support the elimination of bias in recruitment, training, performance assessment, and compensation systems. Respondents express modest approval with the fairness of their coworkers. They are somewhat supportive of the notion that their institution lacks interest in establishing a barrier-free workplace and that there are no other communication methods available to them. Disabled staff members contended that the supervisor had to offer greater motivation and asserted that there is no favouritism in their career advancement procedure. They are strongly opposed to the idea that the business utilises a distinct method for recruitment, performance assessment, and designated training duration for personnel with special needs. The study's results reveal that organisational culture, disability discrimination, and exclusionary practices are the three predominant discriminatory concerns.

(d) Employability and work life for individuals with health-related debilities in the higher education sector

Author of this article has diligently searched for literature related to the aforementioned theme utilising “Google Scholar, open access research databases, and other online journal articles” during “November, 2024 to January, 2025”. He asserts, based on his above-mentioned search for this topic, that there is a scarcity of both review-based and empirical literature about the employability and work life of individuals with disabilities, particularly in relation to higher education institutions in both “India” and abroad.

(e) Perspectives of educators on employability and work life of disabled persons

Author of this intellectual endeavour made genuine efforts in searching for literature based on above mentioned topic using “Google Scholar, open access research databases, and other online journal articles” during “November, 2024 to January, 2025”. He opines based on search for this topic, that there is paucity of qualitative research studies on views of academicians on work opportunities and occupational life of individuals with health-related debilities in both “India” and foreign countries.

(f) Research gap

Author of this article based on his honest efforts during “November, 2024 to January, 2025” by using “Google Scholar, open access research databases, and other online journal articles” for searching literature on key topics covered in this article has found the below mentioned research gap.

- (i) There is a paucity of both review-based and empirical research about the employability and job life of individuals with disabilities, especially for higher education institutions in both “India” and foreign countries.
- (ii) There is a scarcity of qualitative research studies concerning the perspectives of current and former academicians on employment chances and the professional lives of individuals with health-related disabilities in both “India and abroad”. Hence, the author of this article who has teaching and research experience in reputed higher educational institutions prominently in “Tamil Nadu state, India” and based on his interaction with acquaintances who are working in various colleges as well as universities in various parts of the country, decided to provide his valuable perspectives based on the above stated research gap regarding employment and work opportunities of people with disabilities.

(VI) Source of information

Author of this intellectual endeavour had made use of secondary sources of information. It includes journal articles, doctoral dissertations, websites, books, etc. The aforementioned sources were consulted for the documentation of literature relevant to various themes of this article.

(VII) Perspective based themes covered in this article

- (1) Employability of individual with disabilities in higher education sector of “India”

Themes pertinent to employment prospects for disabled individuals inside “Indian higher education institutions, utilised for documenting the author’s perspectives are given below.

- (i) Government employment in higher educational institutions.,
- (ii) Private employment prospects in higher educational organizations., and
- (iii) Perspectives on the problems of employability in higher educational institutions.

(2) Work life of staffs with health-related debilities in higher education sector of “India”

Topics related to work life of staffs with health-related debilities in higher education institutions of India used for documenting perspective of author are mentioned below.

- (i) Factual information relating to differently abled staffs in higher educational institutions., and
- (ii) Challenges experienced by disabled employees in work at higher educational organizations.

(VIII) Time duration

Topic of this article and various themes for reviewing literature based on research interest of the author was decided during “November, 2024”. He searched for literature pertaining to various themes of this article using “Google Scholar, open access research databases, and other online journal articles” from “November, 2024 to January, 2025”. Finalizing about themes for this review-based article, segregation of relevant articles, and entire article was documented by the author during “February, 2025”.

(IX) Views of the author

(1) Employability of people with health-related debilities in higher education sector of “India”

(i) Employment opportunities in higher educational institutions under the control of government

“Permanent government work opportunities in higher education institutions of India are beneficial for all talented and passionate individuals having health related debilities, especially for those having problems in eyes and hands. This is because higher educational institutions coming directly under central and state government ensures job security as well as conducive work environment suited for professional growth of disabled staffs. I am aware that central universities, nationally reputed academic and research institutions coming directly under the control of Government of India is a blessing for people with disabilities because recruitment process followed specifically in the mentioned organizations is genuine and transparent.”

(ii) Private employment opportunities in higher educational institutions

“Employment chances in private higher educational organizations of India are slowly increasing and is beneficial for disabled persons who have health related incapacities which does not affect their work performance in a significant manner. For example, disabled staff in private higher educational institution of India, having problems in walking may be able to work effectively provided that infrastructural needs and work flexibility based on his or her health-related debility is provided. I am optimistic that all the private higher education institutions in the entire country in upcoming years would definitely provide employment opportunities to the talented persons with disabilities by focussing on utilising their unique skills of such individuals effectively and providing necessary work place flexibility by genuinely considering their health-related limitations.”

(iii) Perspectives on the problems of employability in higher educational institutions

“I have provided the below mentioned personal perspectives based on my past teaching cum research related experience and through interaction with acquaintances who are currently working in various higher educational institutions of India.

(a) Major problem in employment for individuals with health-related debilities in central cum state universities, reputed government funded academic and research institutions which directly comes under the control of central or state or union territories government in “India” is the limited availability of posts for such persons in the mentioned organization. It is dependent on the overall number of teaching and non-teaching vacancies in the mentioned higher education institutions. All the government-aided higher educational institutions in our country may not prioritize hiring individuals with health-related incapacities.

(b) Private higher educational organizations in “India” may hesitate to provide job opportunities to differently abled staff due to their perception of reduced work efficiency among disabled individuals in meeting the present scenario’s multifaceted demands of both teaching and non-teaching positions in higher education institutions of our country.”

(2) Occupational life of disabled employees in higher education sector of “India”

(i) Factual information regarding differently abled staff in higher educational institutions

“I will not be able to provide my view on the mentioned topic. This is because there is no recently published reliable online information about details of disabled staffs in higher educational institutions of entire India.”

(ii) Obstacles faced by employees with health - related debilities in higher educational organizations

“I have presented the following personal views derived from my previous teaching and research experience, as well as personal interactions with known people currently employed at various higher educational institutions in India.

(a) Work flexibility, depending upon the nature of health-related debilities for employees with disabilities, may not be offered in every higher educational institution of India. It is dependent on the decision of superiors and the consensus of other staff members working in the mentioned institution. I also wish to state that there is no recently published reliable online information about details of work place flexibility provided to every differently abled staff based on their nature of health - related debilities by all higher educational institution of our nation.

(b) Disabled friendly infrastructure especially suiting to needs of staffs with chronic health related debilities may not be available in every higher educational institution of India.

(c) Superiors and colleagues in higher educational institutions in our country may be unable to offer necessary help to employees with health-related debilities in performing their duties, as each staff member in these organisations has their own complex job obligations.

(d) All private higher education institutions in our country may be unable to offer accommodation, transport services, or meet the particular needs of every staff with disabilities.

(e) Every private higher educational institution in India may not be equipped to offer requisite accommodations for employees with chronic disabilities (Example, Blind staff) to fulfil their job tasks efficiently.”

(X) Major findings from the perspectives provided by the author

(1) Employability of individuals with health-related limitations in the higher education sector in “India”

(i) Government employment in higher educational institutions

Author opines that permanent employment prospects in higher education institutions in “India” are advantageous for all skilled and dedicated individuals with disabilities, particularly those with health limitations in eyes and hands. He further states that higher educational institutions coming under central and state governments guarantees job security and fosters an environment suitable to the professional development of differently abled employees. He has positive view about central universities, nationally reputed academic and research institutions coming directly under the control of “Government of India”. He believes that recruitment process implemented at the specified organisations is authentic and transparent.

(ii) Private employment prospects in higher educational organizations

Author has mentioned that employment opportunities at private higher educational institutions in “India” are gradually improving, which is advantageous for individuals with health-related disabilities that do not substantially impair their work performance. He has given example stating that differently abled employees in private higher educational institutions in “India”, who have mobility challenges, can perform well if their infrastructure requirements and work flexibility, tailored to their health-related limitations, are accommodated.

(iii) Perspectives on the problems of employability in higher educational institutions

Author has mentioned his personal views below on the mentioned topic based on his past teaching cum research experience, as well as his personal interactions with known people who are presently employed in various higher educational organizations of “India”.

(a) The primary difficulty regarding employment for individuals with disabilities in central and state universities, as well as esteemed government-funded academic and research institutions under the jurisdiction of the central or state governments and union territories in “India”, is the restricted availability of work-related vacancy for these individuals within the aforementioned organisations. It is reliant upon the total number of teaching and non-teaching positions at the specified higher educational institutions. Not all government-funded higher educational institutions in our country may prioritise the employment of individuals with health-related limitations.

(b) Private higher educational institutions in “India” may be reluctant to offer employment to differently abled individuals due to their perception of diminished work efficiency in fulfilling the complex demands of both teaching and non-teaching roles within the country's higher education sector.

(2) Work life of staffs with health-related debilities in higher education sector of “India”

(i) Factual information relating to differently abled staffs in higher educational institutions

Author has not provided his views on the mentioned theme. This is due to the absence of recently published credible internet information regarding details of employees with health-related debilities at higher educational institutions across India.

(ii) Challenges experienced by disabled employees in work at higher educational organizations

Author has given his personal perspectives on the topic below, which is derived from his previous teaching and research experience, as well as his personal interactions with acquaintances currently employed at various higher education institutions across “India”.

(a) Work flexibility, based upon the form of health-related limitations for employees with disabilities, may not be available in all government and private higher educational institutions in “India”. It is reliant on the judgement of superiors and the agreement of other staff members at the colleges and universities of our nation. He further states that there is no currently published reliable online information regarding the workplace flexibility offered to differently abled employees, tailored to their specific health-related disabilities, by higher educational institutions in our nation.

(b) Infrastructure accommodating individuals with chronic health-related disabilities may not be present in all higher educational institutions of “India”.

(c) Superiors and colleagues in higher educational institutions in our country may be unable to offer necessary support to employees with health-related limitations in performing their duties, as each staff member has their own complex job obligations.

(d) All private higher education institutions in our country may lack the capacity to provide lodging, transport services, or address the specific requirements of all staff members with disabilities.

(e) Every private higher educational institution in India shall be equipped to provide necessary accommodations for personnel with chronic disabilities (Example: Staffs having eye sight related debilities.) to perform their job responsibilities effectively.

(XI) Recommendations

Practical suggestions based on findings of this study are given under relevant topics. These recommendations would help in increasing work opportunities for disabled people in higher education sector and to make their work environment conducive.

(a) Work opportunities

(i) Current reservation system adopted by “Government of India” needs to be modified. Present reservation system in Government jobs based on overall vacancies in every institution needs to be altered and it should be based on job vacancy in every department of the organization. This valuable suggestion would increase employment opportunities for all the people of India. It would also benefit disabled persons aspiring to join higher educational sector of this nation.

(ii) “Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, New Delhi, Government of India” after getting needed approval from topmost government authorities needs to make a major decision regarding conducting recruitment drive every year exclusively for talented persons having disabilities for both teaching and non – teaching staffs in all higher educational cum research institutions coming directly under control of either central or state or union territories government in this country. “University Grants Commission, New Delhi” coming under “Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, New Delhi, Government of India” should be given the responsibility of implementing the above proposed recruitment drive every year.

(iii) “Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Government of India” after getting needed approval from topmost government authorities needs to make a major decision about ensuring that employment opportunities are compulsorily created every year and implemented exclusively for disabled persons in all private higher educational institutions of India.

(iv) “Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Government of India” after getting needed approval from topmost government authorities needs to develop a policy for providing employment opportunities compulsorily and exclusively for highly educated and talented people with chronic health limitations (“Example: Blind persons, individuals having tremors in hands, etc.”) in higher educational institutions of the country.

(b) Work life

(i) “University Grants Commission, New Delhi, India” after getting needed consent from “Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Government of India” needs to make it mandatory for all higher educational organizations in the nation to ensure that work flexibility is implemented in an effective manner for staffs having health related debilities. This would definitely reduce stress levels of loyal cum passionate disabled employees.

(ii) “University Grants Commission, New Delhi, India” after getting needed permission from “Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Government of India” should make it compulsory for all higher educational institutions in the country to plan and utilise unique skills of differently abled staffs in the best possible manner. “Example: Disabled teacher in “Social Work” subject who has “Tremors in hands” may be

given work flexibility requiring less written and typing work. He or she can be given additional subject papers and students to guide in fieldwork or research and responsibilities related to publication”.

(iii) “University Grants Commission, New Delhi, India” after getting needed approval from “Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Government of India” needs to make it mandatory for all higher educational institutions to submit details every academic year regarding disabled friendly infrastructure, work flexibility provided to every staff with health-related limitations, particulars about strategies adopted to utilise unique skills of such employees, etc. All the above-mentioned information pertaining to higher education sector needs to be updated in “University Grants Commission, New Delhi, India” official website every academic year, once above suggested policy decision is taken after getting required approval from “Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Government of India”.

(XII) Conclusion

This review article has examined theoretical and research-based literature about employability and professional life of individuals with health-related debilities in higher education sector. It also analyses research findings regarding the viewpoints of educators on the employment prospects and work life of disabled individuals in higher education institutions. The author of this scholarly work has presented his viewpoints on themes concerning employability and the job life of individuals with disabilities in higher education institutions in “India”. Examination of the existing literature on the employability and work life of individuals with disabilities reveals a lack of both review-based and research studies on this subject, both in India and internationally. There is a dearth of qualitative research studies, both in India and foreign countries, that elucidates the perspectives of present and previous educators in the higher education sector about the issue of this article. The author identifies challenges regarding employment opportunities for disabled individuals in “India's higher educational sector”, including limited job prospects in central and state universities and the reluctance of private higher education institutions to offer employment to these individuals. The author's perspective on the challenges encountered by employees with health-related limitations in “Indian higher education institutions” includes inadequate infrastructure to meet the needs of staff with chronic health conditions, inconsistent application of work flexibility tailored to specific health limitations, and insufficient support from supervisors and colleagues. Recommendations in this academic pursuit will improve the employability of individuals with disabilities and boost their quality of work life within “Indian higher education”.

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Declaration

This review-based article is based on genuine original work undertaken by the author. All the perspectives given by the author in this intellectual work are based on his past teaching cum research experiences as well as from personal interaction with acquaintances who are currently working in higher educational institutions of "India".